

# PERUVIAN

Military Culture

2018



*The following report is part of the Florida International University—United States Southern Command Academic Partnership. United States Southern Command provides funding to support this series as part of its academic outreach efforts. Academic outreach is intended to support United States Southern Command with new ideas, outside perspectives, and spark candid discussions. The views expressed in this findings report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the United States Government, United States Southern Command, Florida International University, or any other affiliated institutions.*

# PERUVIAN MILITARY CULTURE

Frank O. Mora, Ph.D, Brian Fonseca, & Juan Carlos Liendo

## General Characteristics

Peruvian military culture<sup>i</sup> reflects the evolution of the country's social, political, and military history. The culture claims its heritage from the Incan Empire through the Spanish viceregal era, struggling for independence and later attempting to recover after the catastrophic military defeat against Chile. Throughout the twentieth century, Peru's efforts have focused on creating a maintaining internal sociopolitical stability, although it finds itself in a state of flux today.

- The Peruvian military traces its lineage to the Incan and Spanish imperial forces.
- The birthdate of the modern Peruvian Army is based on the Peruvian Guard Legion's foundation on August 18, 1821.
- The War of the Pacific (1879-1883) is viewed as a national military disaster that was caused by a lack of national unity and internal political instability. As Chile invaded and occupied Peru, seizing its southern territory, perception of Chile as an ever-present threat grew. During the war, however, leaders of the Peruvian forces stood strong against insurmountable odds, never backing down or surrendering, but instead showing heroism, sacrifice, and dedication. The actions by these commanders are the basis of inspiration for much of contemporary military culture.
- Peruvian military culture has historically been driven by the quest to forge a national identity from a society long-divided along ethnic, racial, geographic, and cultural lines.

## External Influences

- External influences on Peruvian military identity were strongest from 1896 to the 1970s as the Army professionalized, the Air Force was established, and the Navy modernized.
- The professionalization of the Peruvian Army, from 1896-1940, was undertaken by a French military mission comprised of Foreign Legionnaire officers with Algerian colonial experience, while the Peruvian Navy claims a cultural affinity with the U.S., and the Air Force traces its cultural heritage to Italy.
- In the mid-1960s, U.S. counterinsurgency training emphasized civic action programs to enable socioeconomic development, heavily influenced Army culture.
- Soviet military influence peaked during the Peruvian conventional military buildup of the 1970s and ended in the 1990s.

## A National Identity to Unify Society

- The dominant military cultural narrative has been the Peruvian Army's advocacy of forging a national identity to unify society. The result increased political-military tensions throughout the country's history.
- To broaden acceptance and support of a national identity across society, the Army promotes military events and personalities from throughout Peruvian history that underscore the values of resistance and self-sacrifice.
- The country's general political instability and paralysis from the 1930s-1950s convinced many senior officers that the social, political, and economic reforms necessary to ensure

national security could only be attained by the armed forces. This belief culminated with the military's seizure of power and the installation of its Revolutionary Government of the People and Armed Forces (GPAF) in 1968.

- The socially and politically conservative Navy eventually publicly resisted the Armydominated GPAF's radical leftist social, economic, and political programs, causing internal discord within the military.

### **Sources of Pride and Identity**

- Viewed as exemplars of strength, will, power, and wisdom, Incan emperors, especially Inca Pachacutec, have long been revered by the Peruvian military and society.
- During the War of the Pacific, both specific battles and commanders became steadfast symbols of dedication, self-sacrifice, and resolve in the face of certain death and defeat.
- An unofficial part of the narrative, General Juan Velasco Alvarado, the leader of the coup that deposed the civilian government from power in 1968 and the first president of the GPAF, is viewed as imposing the social, economic, and political reforms to achieve national unity.
- Operation Chavin de Huantar, the 1997 rescue operation of 71 people held hostage by the Túpac Amaru at the Japanese Ambassador's residence in Lima, is a primary contemporary source of pride.

### **Military and Society**

- Peru's chronically weak governance has influenced civil-military relations. The military saw itself as the only national institution that has been able to maintain domestic stability during the country's frequent social and political upheaval.
- The Army has advocated and performed socioeconomic development throughout its history, often blaming the political system and civilian governments for instability and socioeconomic underdevelopment.
- The Navy has tended to be socially and politically conservative. During the fight against terrorist organizations (Sendero Luminoso and the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary MovementMRTA), the military assumed political and administrative control of emergency zones, which helped to enhance its influence and image in rural areas.
- The success of its anti-terrorist campaign boosted its image and reputation within society but it was quickly undercut by the systemic abuses, particularly human rights violations and corruption.
- Today, the military's influence on society has been virtually eliminated after it was ostracized and isolated following the end of the Fujimori presidency in 2000.
- In spite of its more recent degradation, the military remains one of the most popular institutions in Peruvian society.

*Dr. Frank O. Mora is Director of the Kimberly Green Latin American and Caribbean Center (LACC) and Professor of Politics and International Relations at Florida International University. Brian Fonseca is Director of the Jack D. Gordon Institute for Public Policy at FIU's Steven J. Green School of International and Public Affairs. Juan Carlos Liendo is a professor of International Relations at Universidad San Ignacio de Loyola in Lima, Peru and serves as a Security Risk Manager Consultant at ATHOQ S.A.C—a Peruvian company that provides Political and Security Risk analysis to public and private sectors.*

---

<sup>i</sup> This study seeks to identify the most prevailing historical and cultural considerations that run across the military institution. However, the authors recognize that there are, at times, competing sub-cultures within and across the branches that comprise the military institution.

